

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

WHITE HOUSE IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 037142 TOSEC 020007

NODIS

WHITE HOUSE FOR DR BRZEZINSKI

FOL TEL SENT ACTION SECSTATE FROM TEL AVIV DTD 13 FEB 1978 QTE

S E C R E T TEL AVIV 2017

NODIS

DEPT PASS WHITE HOUSE FOR BRZEZINSKI

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, IS, US, EG

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN--BRIEFING ON SADAT
VISIT AND PROTESTS OVER SECRETARY VANCE'S STATEMENT ON
SINAI SETTLEMENTS

REF: (A) STATE 34284, (B) STATE 35470, (C) TEL AVIV 1982

SUMMARY: BRIEFED BEGIN ON SADAT VISIT. HE WAS TOTALLY PRE-
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OCCUPIED INSTEAD WITH THE DETERMINATION TO PROTEST IN ANRER AND
ANGUISH THE SECRETARY'S STATEMENTS ABOUT SINAI SETTLEMENTS AT
HIS PRESS CONFERENCE ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10. CONVERSATION RE-
PORTED IN DETAIL TO GIVE FULL FLAVOR OF PROBLEM WE ARE FACING
HERE. END SUMMARY

1. I MET WITH BEGIN EVENING OF FEBRUARY 11 FOR WHAT
TURNED INTO A TWO-AND-A-HALF HOUR SESSION. INITIAL
PURPOSE HAD BEEN TO BRIEF BEGIN ON RESULTS OF SADAT
VISIT TO WASHINGTON; BEGIN, HOWEVER, TURNED MEETING

INTO OPPORTUNITY TO BERATE US ON SEVERAL ISSUES, ALL INVOLVING LANGUAGE USED EITHER IN POST-SADAT VISIT WHITE HOUSE STATEMENT OR IN SECRETARY'S PRESS CONFERENCE THE PREVIOUS DAY. TONE OF SOME OF HIS COMMENTS AND PORTIONS OF HIS PRESENTATION WERE AMONG THE MOST EMOTIONAL I HAVE HEARD FROM BEGIN. WITH THE PRIME MINISTER WERE WEIZMAN, ATTORNEY GENERAL BARAK, EVRON, ROSENNE AND AVNER. VIETS AND KIRBY ACCOMPANIED ME. BEGIN AND WEIZMAN BOTH APPEARED TIRED AND VERY SOMBER, AND THERE WAS NO GLAD-HANDING AS WE ENTERED (INTERRUPTING WHAT HAD EVIDENTLY BEEN A PRE-MEETING SESSION). BEGIN ALSO LOOKED DRAWN AND SALLOW, AND THE MIXTURE OF FATIGUE, TENSIO, AND EMOTION SOMEWHAT REMINDED ME OF HIS APPEARANCE IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO HIS LAST HOSPITALIZATION.

2. I BEGAN BY DRAWING EXTENSIVELY FROM REF A TO SUM UP SADAT'S VISIT, AND THEN FOLLOWED UP WITH A THOROUGH TREATMENT OF ALL THE ISSUES DAYAN HAD RAISED PER REF B. FROM THEIR EXPRESSIONS IT WAS CLEAR THAT BEGIN, WEIZMAN AND EVRON HAD ALREADY HEARD MUCH THE SAME FROM DAYAN. INTERJECTIONS WERE FEW. WHEN I MENTIONED THAT "HE" FEELS THAT THE ISRAELI PROPOSALS
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FOR SINAI AND WEST BANK/GAZA FELL SHORT OF "HIS" REQUIREMENTS, BEGIN INTERRUPTED TO MAKE SURE THAT "HE" WAS SADAT AND NOT PRESIDENT CARTER.

3. AT ANOTHER POINT EVRON INTERRUPTED TO CLARIFY WHETHER SADAT HAD SAID HE NEEDED JORDANIAN INVOLVEMENT BEFORE HE COULD SIGN A BILATERAL AGREEMENT. (AS YOU KNOW, THIS IS THE SAME QUESTION DAYAN HAS BEEN POSING CONTINUALLY IN RECENT WEEKS.) I RESPONDED THAT SADAT BELIEVES JORDAN MUST BECOME INVOLVED IN THE NEGOTIATIONS AND THAT THIS PROBABLY WILL REQUIRE PRIOR DISCUSSION OF THE BROAD OUTLINES OF A WEST BANK AGREEMENT, BUT THAT IT SEEMED TO US SADAT HAD NOT YET CLEARLY THOUGHT THROUGH THIS ELEMENT OF THE NEGOTIATION. SUBSEQUENTLY I ADDRESSED THIS QUESTION MORE FULLY WHEN I BRIEFED FROM PARAS 6-8 OF REF B.

4. BEGIN GAVE A FORETASTE OF THINGS TO COME TOWARD THE END OF MY PRESENTATION BY HOPPING ON MY USE OF THE PHRASE "OCCUPIED TERRITORIES," POINTING OUT THAT THE 242 LANGUAGE IS "TERRITORIES OCCUPIED IN THE RECENT CONFLICT" AND THAT THE SECRETARY HAD ERRONEOUSLY REFERRED TO "OCCUPIED TERRITORIES" SEVERAL TIMES IN RECENT PRESS CONFERENCES. I CONFESSED I DIDN'T SEE A CRITICAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO, STRESSED THAT THE SECRETARY KNOWS THE LANGUAGE OF 242 VERY WELL, AND THAT THE ISRAELIS KNOW VERY WELL WHAT WE MEAN WHEN

WE USE SUCH "SHORT HAND". I URGED BEGIN NOT TO MAKE AN ISSUE WHERE THERE ISN'T ONE.

5. BEGIN THANKED ME IN HIS TYPICALLY GENEROUS FASHION FOR THE BRIEFING AND CONFIRMED THAT WHAT I HAD SAID TRACKED WITH WHAT DAYAN HAD REPORTED. HE THEN ABRUPTLY AND FORMALLY ANNOUNCED THAT HE WISHED TO SPEAK ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND ISRAEL. (HE PICKED UP A TWO-PAGE DOCUMENT, WHICH
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I ASSUMED AT THE TIME WAS THE SECRETARY'S PRESS CONFERENCE BUT WHICH MAY HAVE BEEN A DRAFT OF THE GOVERNMENT STATEMENT ISSUED FOLLOWING THE NEXT DAY'S CABINET MEETING.) HE SAID THAT ON THE PREVIOUS DAY (FEBRUARY 10) THE SECRETARY ("WHOM I ADMIRE AND RESPECT") HAD REFERRED TO THE ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN THE SINAI, SAYING THEY WERE CONTRARY TO INTERNATIONAL LAW AND SHOULD NOT EXIST. HE ADDED THAT THE SECRETARY WENT ON TO SAY, HOWEVER, THAT THIS IS AN ISSUE THE PARTIES WOULD HAVE TO NEGOTIATE. LAYING DOWN THE PAPER AND ADDRESSING ME FORMALLY AS "MR. AMBASSADOR," BEGIN SAID HE WOULD SPEAK IN SORROW, NOT ANGER. IN MEASURED TONES HE SAID, "I HAVE NEVER BEEN MORE HURT SINCE I CAME INTO OFFICE THAN BY SUCH A DECLARATION--THAT OUR SETTLEMENTS SHOULD NOT EXIST."

6. BEGIN THEN LAUNCHED INTO A 15-MINUTE OFTEN HIGHLY EMOTIONAL MONOLOGUE AS FOLLOWS: I (BEGIN) WENT TO WASHINGTON IN DECEMBER. ON THE 16TH I EXPLAINED OUR POSITION TO PRESIDENT CARTER, POINTING OUT THAT IN THE NORTH WE HAVE THE PROBLEM OF THE AREA BETWEEN EL-ARISH AND RAFAH WHERE THERE ARE JEWISH SETTLEMENTS. (HE CALLED UPON BARAK TO READ FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING.) I WANTED TO GO ON TO MY SECOND POINT, BUT THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF INTERRUPTED ME AND SAID THAT IN HIS OPINION THERE WAS NOTHING IN MY PROPOSAL THAT SADAT CANNOT ACCEPT. HE TERMED IT A VERY REASONABLE PROPOSAL. NOW SECRETARY VANCE SAYS THESE SETTLEMENTS SHOULD NOT EXIST. WHY WASN'T I TOLD THIS ON DECEMBER 16? THE SETTLEMENTS WERE INCLUDED IN MY PROPOSAL. PRESIDENT CARTER COULD HAVE TOLD ME THE PLAN WAS GOOD EXCEPT FOR THE SETTLEMENTS. OR HE COULD HAVE SAID GO TO SADAT AND
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SEE HOW HE RESPONDS, BUT INSTEAD HE SAID "THIS PLAN IS VERY REASONABLE." THE REMARK YESTERDAY BY SECRETARY VANCE IS A COMPLETE CONTRADICTION TO WHAT THE PRESIDENT TOLD ME ON DECEMBER 16.

7. BEGIN CONTINUED: I KNOW OF MANY THINGS THAT ARE CONTRARY TO INTERNATIONAL LAW BUT YET HAVE EXISTED FOR MANY YEARS. BUT I STATE ON BEHALF OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL THAT THESE SETTLEMENTS ARE LEGAL AND LEGITIMATE AND WE SHALL STAND BY THIS. FOR NINETEEN YEARS THERE WAS AN OCCUPATION OF JUDEA AND SAMARIA BY JORDAN AS A RESULT OF ITS INVASION IN AN ATTEMPT TO DESTROY OUR NEW STATE. THEN CAME THE ANNEXATION. NOBODY SAID THAT SHOULD NOT EXIST, ALTHOUGH FOR NINETEEN YEARS WE COULD NOT GO TO THE WESTERN WALL. THERE WAS ALSO THE EGYPTIAN OCCUPATION OF PART OF PALESTINE--GAZA--BUT NOBODY SAID THAT SHOULD NOT EXIST. TWICE THE TIRAN STRAITS WERE CLOSED CONTRARY TO INTERNATIONAL LAW, BUT NOBODY SAID THAT SHOULD NOT HAPPEN. THE SECOND TIME WE HAD A PLEDGE FROM EISENHOWER THAT IT WOULD NOT HAPPEN, BUT WE STILL HAD TO FIGHT TO RESTORE INTERNATIONAL LAW. NOW COMES THIS STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY CALLING OUR SETTLEMENTS ILLEGAL AND FOLLOWING THE VISIT OF SADAT, WHO IS CONDUCTING A CAMPAIGN OF INCITEMENT AGAINST ISRAEL.

8. THE MONOLOGUE WENT ON: PERES CALLED TO SAY HE WAS INVITED TO MEET WITH SADAT AND TO ASK ME WHAT HE SHOULD SAY. I ASKED HIM TO TELL SADAT, IF HE AGREED, THAT THERE WOULD NEVER BE A GOVERNMENT IN ISRAEL THAT WOULD DISMANTLE THOSE SETTLEMENTS; PERES SAID HE HAD ALREADY PLANNED TO SAY JUST THAT. EVEN MAPAM DEMANDS OFFICIALLY THAT ISRAELI SOVEREIGNTY SHOULD BE APPLIED TO THAT AREA. ASIDE FROM THE COMMUNISTS AND ONE OR TWO OTHERS, NOT ONE GROUP IN PARLIAMENT WOULD DISMANTLE THOSE SETTLEMENTS. SADAT MAY THINK
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PERES WILL BE THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER, BUT WHOEVER IT IS, NO PRIME MINISTER CAN DISMANTLE THOSE SETTLEMENTS. BRZEZINSKI RECENTLY SAID THAT ISRAEL IS MORE THAN AN ALLY, IT'S A PART OF THE FAMILY. NOW WE'RE BEING TREATED LIKE A (ASKED COLLEAGUES FOR MEANING OF HEBREW WORD) STEP-SON. (ROSENNE SUGGESTED "PRODIGAL SON.")

9. BEGIN WENT ON: WITH DEEP REGRET IN MY HEART I SAY THAT SADAT IS GOING AROUND THE WORLD SAYING THERE ARE JEWS IN THOSE SETTLEMENTS WHO MAY BE HURT. HE ALSO REFERS TO "MY SACRED LAND." WHAT SACRED LAND? FIVE TIMES IT WAS THE BASE OF AGGRESSION AGAINST ISRAEL. SECRETARY VANCE SAYS THE TWO PARTIES SHOULD NEGOTIATE THE ISSUE. WHY SHOULD SADAT NEGOTIATE NOW THAT THE SECRETARY SAYS THEY SHOULDN'T EXIST? WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM SADAT AFTER SUCH A STATEMENT? I SPEAK NOT ONLY WITH REGRET, BUT WITH A PROTEST IN

MY HEART. I LODGE AN OFFICIAL PROTEST ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT AGAINST THIS STATEMENT. NOBODY WARNED US. THIS IS A MOST DELICATE ISSUE. I CAN NOW UNDERSTAND WHY SADAT SAYS THE U.S. IS WITH HIM. YET WE HAVE A PERFECT RIGHT TO NEGOTIATE A SOLUTION TO THIS ISSUE, AND IT IS IN ACCORDANCE WITH WHAT PRESIDENT CARTER TOLD MY PREDECESSOR ALSO. (BEGIN THEN READ FROM MINUTES OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER RABIN'S MARCH 8 MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CARTER.) PRESIDENT CARTER TOLD RABIN "I HAVE EXAMINED THE MAP CLOSELY, AND I UNDERSTAND THAT SETTLEMENTS IN THE SINAI AND GAZA HAVE A STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE."

10. WHEN BEGIN THEN SAID THAT ISRAEL HAS A PERFECT RIGHT TO ASK FOR A BORDER RECTIFICATION, I FINALLY
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BROKE IN TO POINT OUT THAT ISRAEL HAS NOT DONE SO. BEGIN RETORTED THAT, "IN ACCORDANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL LAW," ISRAEL CAN ANY DAY RETRACT ITS PLAN AND REVERT TO BORDER RECTIFICATION. HE THEN SUMMED UP HIS PRESENTATION AS FOLLOWS: "WHY WAS I (BEGIN) NOT TOLD DURING MY VISIT TO WASHINGTON THAT THESE SETTLEMENTS WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE? IT WAS NOT A CONCIDENCE THAT I WENT FIRST TO THE UNITED STATES TO SEEK SOME ENCOURAGEMENT BEFORE MAKING STEPS AT GREAT INTERNAL POLITICAL RISK. NOW I AM BEING ATTACKED BY THE OPPOSITION AND BY OLD FRIENDS. HAD I KNOWN THAT THE U.S. DID NOT SUPPORT MY PLAN, I WOULD NOT HAVE GONE TO ISMAILIA WITH IT. I ONLY WENT BECAUSE I THOUGHT I HAD THE SUPPORT OF THE PRESIDENT. THE WHOLE STORY OF THE LAST TWO MONTHS WOULD HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT. NOW WE HEAR SUCH A STATEMENT ACCEPTING 100 PERCENT THE POINT OF VIEW OF SADAT. WHAT DID WE DO TO DESERVE BEING TREATED THIS WAY."

11. AS HE STARTED TO GO INTO THE NEXT INNING, I INTERRUPTED TO SAY THAT I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A FEW OBSERVATIONS ABOUT HIS REMARKS. I REMINDED BEGIN THAT I ALSO ATTENDED THE DECEMBER MEETINGS. I ALSO REMINDED HIM THAT WHEN HE PRESENTED HIS SINAI PROPOSAL, HE MERELY READ OUT SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES; HE HAD NOT PRESENTED THEN ANY PAPER AS WAS THE CASE WITH HIS "SELF-RULE PLAN." I TOLD HIM THAT IT HAD BEEN MY IMPRESSION THAT EVERYONE WHO HEARD HIS PRINCIPLES FOR A SINAI SETTLEMENT WAS INDEED VERY IMPRESSED BECAUSE HE SPOKE OF A COMPLETE RESTORATION OF EGYPTIAN SOVEREIGNTY. IN RETROSPECT IT IS CLEAR THAT HIS QUITE BRIEF REFERENCE TO ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS HAD NOT RECEIVED THE ATTENTION IT DESERVED. I SAID THAT WHEN THE PRESIDENT REPLIED AS HE DID, HE WAS CLEARLY REACTING TO THE GENERAL THRUST OF THE

ISRAELI PROPOSAL. PERHAPS NEITHER HE NOR ANY OF THE
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REST OF US ON THE AMERICAN SIDE HAD FULLY APPRECIATED--
AS I CERTAINLY HAD NOT--THE SIGNIFICANCE THAT WOULD
BE ATTACHED TO THE RETENTION OF THE SETTLEMENTS AND
TO THE PRESENCE OF ISRAELI DEFENSE UNITS TO PROTECT
THEM.

12. VERY SLOWLY AND VERY CAREFULLY, I SAID I THOUGHT
IT WAS UNFAIR TO STATE THAT PRESIDENT CARTER HAD EN-
DORSED THE RETENTION OF SETTLEMENTS IN THE RAFAH
AREA. THE PRESIDENT HAD SAID THAT WHAT HE
HEARD WAS A REASONABLE BASIS FOR DISCUSSION. BUT
HE HAD ALSO SAID SEVERAL TIMES THAT THE PROPOSAL MAY HAVE
TO UNDERGO CHANGES AND THAT HE COULD NOT BE SURE
THAT SADAT WOULD ACCEPT IT AS IS. TO INTERPRET THAT AS HIS AGREE-
MENT TO THE RETENTION OF SETTLEMENTS IS UNFAIR, ESPECIALLY
WHEN THE US HAS CONSISTENTLY SAID THE CONTRARY IN PUBLIC AND IN
PRIVATE EVER SINCE 1967.

13. BEGIN REJOINED THAT NOW ISRAEL IS BEING ACCUSED OF BEING
UNFAIR. HE INSISTED THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD MADE HIS FAVORABLE
REMARKS VOLUNTARILY AND IMMEDIATELY AFTER BEGIN'S REFERENCE
TO THE SETTLEMENTS IN WHICH HE HAD CLEARLY STATED
THEY WOULD REMAIN AND WOULD "HAVE A DEFENSE CONTINGENT."
BEGIN ADDED THAT WHEN HE SPOKE TO SADAT AT ISMAILIA,
SADAT HAD NOT OBJECTED (TO THE SETTLEMENTS), BUT RATHER
CALLED IT THE HAPPIEST DAY OF HIS LIFE. WHY, THEN, BEGIN
SEEMED TO IMPORE, SHOULD THE SECRETARY NOW SAY THAT THEY
SHOULD NOT EXIST AT ALL? HE COULD UNDERSTAND THE
SECRETARY'S REPEATING OUR POSITION THAT THEY WERE ILLEGAL;
BUT WHY SHOULD HE CALL FOR THEM TO BE PLOWED UP?

14. I REPLIED THAT AS I READ THE TRANSCRIPT THE SECRETARY'S
MEANING SEEMED QUITE CLEAR. THE SECRETARY, RESPONDING TO A
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QUESTION FROM THE PRESS, WAS MERELY SAYING THAT WE HAVE ALWAYS
CONSIDERED THESE SETTLEMENTS ILLEGAL AND IT WOULD BE BETTER
IF THEY HAD NEVER EXISTED. BUT I CERTAINLY DID NOT SEE HIS WORDS
AS A CALL TO GO OUT AND PLOW THEM UP TOMORROW, AS BEGIN HAD
INTERPRETED THEM. BEGIN ASKED WHY THE SECRETARY
COULD NOT HAVE SAID WHAT I HAD JUST SAID* I REMINDED HIM THAT
THE SECRETARY'S REMARKS WERE MADE IN THE MIDST OF A
PRESS CONFERENCE, NOT IN A PREPARED STATEMENT, AND THAT IN
SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES HE, LIKE EVERYONE, MAY SOMETIMES MAKE
ELLIPTICAL REMARKS. BEGIN RETURNED TO THE EFFECT ON SADAT'S
NEGOTIATING STANCE WHEN HE HEARS THE SECRETARY SAY THE SETTLE-
MENTS "SHOULD NOT EXIST", AND OBSERVED THAT NEGOTIATIONS ON

THIS ISSUE HAD NOW BECOME "ALMOST USELESS." HE ASKED WHY ISRAEL SHOULD BE TAKEN BY SURPRISE IN THE MIDST OF DELICATE NEGOTIATIONS. I INSISTED IN REBUTTAL THAT, SURELY, AFTER ALL OF OUR DISCUSSIONS AND ALL OF OUR PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON THE SUBJECT OF SETTLEMENTS HE COULD NOT VALIDLY SAY THAT HE WAS SURPRISED BY THE SECRETARY'S STATEMENT.

15. AT THIS JUNCTURE, MEIR ROSENNE ADDED A TRAGI-COMIC TOUCH TO THE SCENE BY CITING A MR BOYD, SUPPOSEDLY OF THE LEGAL ADVISOR'S OFFICE, TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THE US NEVER SPECIFICALLY REFERRED TO THE SINAI IN ITS STATEMENTS ON SETTLEMENTS. IT WAS NOT EXACTLY WHAT I NEEDED AT THE MOMENT, AND I DISMISSED WHATEVER IT WAS HE WAS ABOUT TO READ AS IRRELEVANT, SAYING IT WAS HARDLY USEFUL TO REVIEW ALL THE STATEMENTS THE US HAD MADE ON THE SUBJECT SINCE 1967. I WAS SURE WE NEVER SPECIFICALLY EXCLUDED THE SINAI, OUR POSITION ON SETTLEMENTS IN GENERAL IS CRYSTAL CLEAR AND I TOLD BEGIN I DID NOT APOLOGIZE FOR IT. ROSENNE SUBSIDED AND I RETURNED MORE PACIFICALLY TO BEGIN TO STATE THAT I HONESTLY FELT HE WAS READING TOO MUCH INTO THE SECRETARY'S CHOICE OF WORDS. BEGIN APPARENTLY DECIDED THAT WAS ENOUGH FOR THIS ROUND, FOR HE THEN PROCEEDED TO COME OUT OF HIS CORNER SWINGING ON THE ISSUE OF "WITHDRAWAL ON ALL FRONTS." A BLOW BY BLOW OF THAT EPISODE FOLLOWS BY
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SEPTTEL. LEWIS UNQTE HABIB

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